

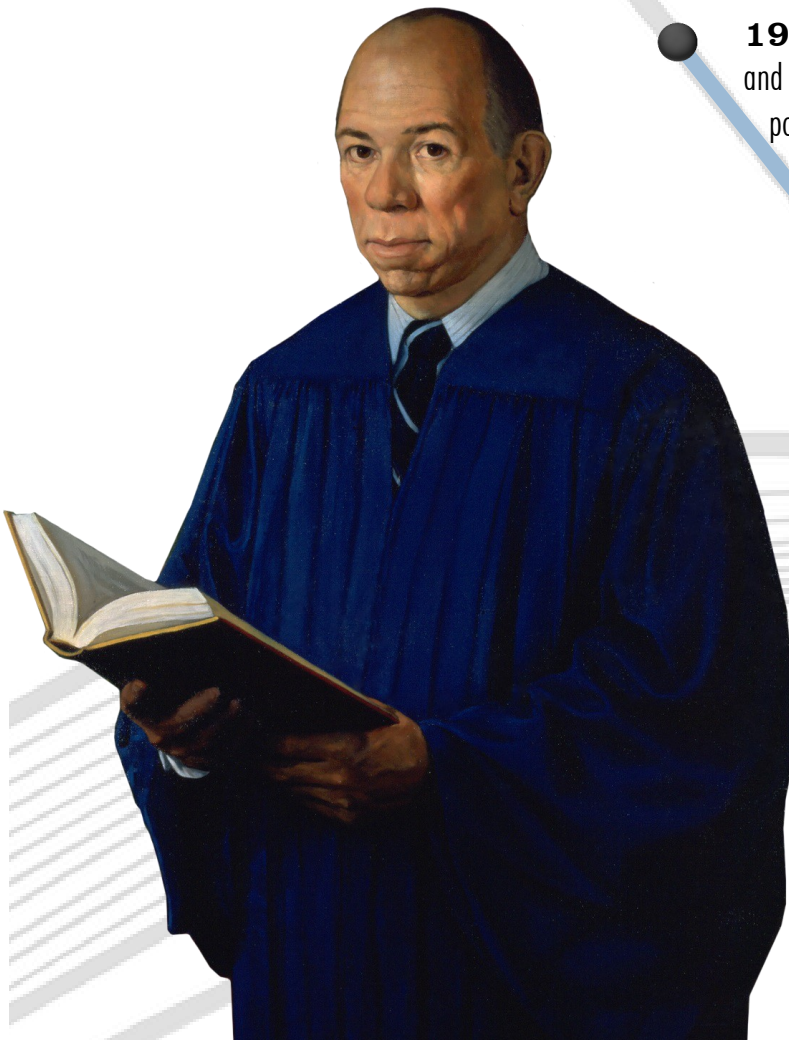
Justice

1922–94 | served 1961–67

# Otis M. Smith

## First African American to serve on the Michigan Supreme Court

Justice Otis M. Smith believed in commitment and character. Although he grew up poor in the segregated South, his military service with the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II earned him a place in law school. There, he won a moot court competition, which led to a job as a lawyer in Flint. As his career progressed, he was appointed to statewide positions, including the Michigan Supreme Court. At one point, he was the highest ranking Black elective official in any state since Reconstruction. After leaving the Court, he went on to break barriers by joining and then leading the legal staff of General Motors, at the time the world's largest corporation.



**1950–61** Graduated law school; practiced law in a Flint firm and as assistant prosecutor for Genesee County; appointed to positions in state government

**1961–67** Served on Michigan Supreme Court

**1967–84** Worked for General Motors legal department

In his memoir, Justice Smith listed his “C’s for success”: competence, character, commitment, confidence, cooperation, concern, and competitiveness.

[Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center](#) | [Biography](#) — [micourthistory.org](#)

Image: Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society